

Live Free

By Steven Bancarz

Foreword:

There is a saying that life will send us whatever experience we need to stimulate the evolution of our soul, and I fully believe this to be the case. Nothing happens randomly in this universe. There is a reason why you have been going through what you're going through, and there is a reason why you decided to read this today. Every experience we have plays a role in the unfolding of our evolution, including the pain and suffering we so often resist. I have a great deal of respect for the place suffering has in our lives, and am grateful for what it has shown me about myself. It squeezes us out of old ways of behaviour and into spiritual maturity. It forces us into expansion. It exposes us to the exploration of inner worlds that otherwise would have remained hidden. It's really the ultimate catalyst for self transformation and transmutation. Suffering serves the most valuable purpose out of any other human experience...up until a point. Sometimes, suffering is just a habit and an addiction and doesn't need to be there. Contrary to what some people may say, it is not a virtue, nor does it have to exist in your life. If it no longer contributes to your evolution, it does not need to be a part of your reality any longer. Eckhart Tolle once said, "Suffering is necessary until we realize it is unnecessary". And upon reflecting on my own life, the majority of my own sufferings could have easily been prevented and did not contribute to anything except redundant pain.

I reached a point where masking symptoms under pleasure no longer satisfied me. I was sick of constantly trying to distract myself from my anxiety, and trying to convince myself I

was happy only made things worse. “You know you’re really messed up when you have to pretend that you’re happy”, my mind would say. This was the most haunting thought of all. I wanted out. At my breaking point, I felt I had tried everything. All I cared about was what was causing my suffering, how it translated into my experience of pain, and what I could do about it. I wasn’t looking for anymore complex spiritual philosophy, and feel-good motivational content always wore off after a short period of time. I just wanted to be free. This book isn’t a typical self-empowerment book. It isn’t filled with typical New Age thought or Tony Robbins-esque motivation. That stuff does serve a purpose and does have its place, but this book has a very simple and straightforward objective. This book is designed to give you insights into the universal causes of suffering, and to provide you with some practices you can do in your daily life that will free you from it. I know what it’s like to sift through endless YouTube videos and self-help quotes in search of peace. I also know what it’s like to continuously come up empty handed.

I began to teach myself how to meditate several years ago, and I spent a great deal of time alone in nature searching for inner peace. I became super clear and honest with myself and with the activities taking place in my mind, because at that point I really had no other option. The more I watched my behaviour and thought about my thinking, the more I began to understand the nature of human suffering. With each new self-discovery and epiphany, a space would open up inside me, almost as if the universe was providing me with room to breathe. Not enough to cure me of everything for good, but just enough to show me I was on the right track. When you read portions of this book, you will feel that same space open up inside you. Something deep within you will activate and you will recognize it as truth, but not in the same way you recognize a conceptual truth in your mind. Something within you will shift. You will feel your soul come alive inside you. When this happens, pay attention to the qualities of that experience.

I want you to know that inner peace, freedom, and joy are all available to you in an unlimited abundance right now. You can and will be happy. You don't need to suffer any longer. It's time to claim your birthright to live free. With that being said, let's begin.

Introduction:

Thank you for loving yourself enough to read this. We are all here to become the best versions of ourselves that we can be so that we live the most fulfilling lives possible. Mental discipline is the most fundamental step we can take towards achieving this goal, but this isn't something that's taught in the classrooms or the workplace. We aren't taught how to cultivate happiness or peace of mind, and nobody takes the time to explain topics to us such as 'emotional alchemy' or 'mindfulness'. Instead, we are just sold "happy pills" at a pharmacy and told that we have a chemical imbalance in the brain causing our depression and suffering.

Little do we realize that the chemicals (such as serotonin) are often not being produced because of how we are choosing to invest our precious attention. If we are stuck in a mental pattern of self-loathing and self-criticism, the chemistry of the body will respond accordingly. If we chose to dwell on how miserable our life is, on how stuck we feel, or on how much we hate ourselves or the world around us, the body will produce chemicals which correspond to those mental states. The chemicals are byproducts of our internal mental activities. As nice as it may seem to believe, the answers to all your problems in life will not be found in a molecule. This is because happiness is a skillset that starts in the mind. It's a way of interacting with your thoughts, emotions, and environment, and it's the most important skill-set you could have. Yet for some reason, it's not taught in the curriculum of

everyday life. Nobody teaches us how to be happy when we grow up, but what could be more important? In order to learn how to be happy and how to overcome our suffering, we have to first discover what is causing our unhappiness and suffering. We have to learn about the disease before we can cure it. And no matter who you are or what your history is, the vast majority of all suffering and negative emotion stems from the same common source: the mind.

Our mind is the gatekeeper to our subjective reality. Every single experience we have is being filtered through the activities taking place in our minds, and when these mental activities go unchecked and untamed for a long enough time they can cause all sorts of problems for us. Why? Because if we don't watch them, they choose our reality for us. Everything we encounter in our experience is being processed and filtered through a stream of automated conscious and subconscious thoughts. These filters are usually grounded in more deep rooted thought-based activity such as religious commitments, personal history, mental programs, cultural values, belief systems, etc. All of these things are really nothing more than a series of thoughts in our head that we subscribe to, and they act as the processing systems for all of our interactions with the world. Everything we experience passes through this veil of perpetual thinking. So in reality, we don't even get to experience the true nature of anything in front of us most of the time. We only experience our minds reactions to them. We experience the world as it relates to our mental screen. We see things as we are, not as they are. As we think, so we see the world. And if the mind has taken us over and has become programmed a certain way during the course of our life, then our experience of the world and the way we relate to events in our life will always be distorted and dictated by these programs. As long as we are subjected to these mental filters and as long as they are still influencing our perception, we will never be free to experience the true nature of a moment, and we will never gain proper insight into ourselves

or a situation. Our experience of reality will always be tainted by involuntary thinking, and this involuntary thinking breeds involuntary emotions. Our organic computer has become infected with a virus, and this virus is what we refer to as “thought”. This is the current disease of mankind.

In reality, the programs that process meaning and interpret data are the things that actually cause the suffering within us. Pain exists inevitably, but the majority of suffering is actually self-created and is nothing more than thoughts. For example, our mind usually decides for us what perspective we are going to take and what words to use to interpret an event in our lives. It often will choose to adopt the perspective that victimizes you the most. Let’s say you got into an argument with a loved one over something you did. Minutes afterwards, your mind may say, “Why did you have to do that again? If you could just do things right for once. Maybe she was right when she said I would never be good enough. But they did that thing and they knew that they shouldn’t have. What the hell is wrong with them?” These thoughts play in our minds like a record, sometimes for hours after the instance has already ended. By choosing to dwell on the situation by thinking about how stupid you are or they are, how they were wrong and you were right, or by constructing a response in your head to what they said during the argument, you are stretching out the single pain-causing moment across time. The suffering happens because of the unconscious identification with the thoughts that wish to dwell on the event and thus make you relive the pain of the past in the present moment. It's kind of like stepping in a pile of mud and choosing to walk through your whole house with your shoes on when you could have just taken them off outside.

The good news is, you are the owner of your mind. You don't have to look at the world through a veil of mental programming. You don't have to be a slave to whatever direction it wishes to take your attention. Your mind belongs to you in the same way that your body belongs to you. It's your possession. It's not you. I never realized until recently that I actually had the ability to influence and control what was going on in my head. It was amazing to me, and nobody had ever told me growing up that I can put my foot down and choose to transcend the misery-causing chatter. For once, it was in my control. Once I experienced the mind as something I owned, it surrendered to me and no longer governed my life. The relationship between the self and the mind can kind of be like having a really crappy roommate who initially wants to rent out a room upstairs, but then starts migrating his stuff into all the other rooms of the house and inviting his friends over to live there too, and the next thing you know you are the one paying the rent to him. It's time to kick him out.

On a personal level, there was a time in my life where I used to live in slavery to my thoughts. They would flood my head against my will and beat me down to the point of physical exhaustion. I would actually have to nap from fatigue caused by excessive thoughts and the emotions they created. The adrenaline, cortisol, and high blood pressure was taking a physical toll on my body. My mind would wake me up in the middle of the night and remind me about everything that was wrong with my life. I would find myself trying to take a pee at four in the morning and being completely consumed with thoughts about my relationship problems, or how much I hated my job, and I couldn't stop it even though I knew it was unproductive. Was I really going to come to a solution by redundantly thinking about a problem at 4 in the morning? Was visiting the same negative thoughts over and over really going to contribute to a positive outcome? Thoughts of self-judgement and self-victimization would follow, such as, "Why can't you stop thinking about this stuff?"

What's wrong with you?", as well as the emotions which corresponded to those thoughts. And then I would spend my energy trying to remedy all of the anxiety and suffering that was being generated by the voices in my head. This was my daily routine: wake up to my mind reminding me to worry and be anxious, and then spend the day trying to solve a problem that never needed to exist in the first place.

My thoughts were so powerful and so exhausting that my favourite part of each day would be daily naps, because in the first 3 seconds of coming out of the nap I would get to experience conscious peace for just a little bit before my mind would kick in and remind me of what I was supposed to be anxious or depressed about for the rest of that day. I felt borderline psychotic at times. I knew that I was a victim to my mind but I didn't know how to escape its grasp. The mind has the potential to be the most wonderful tool, but a lot of the time it acts as a tormentor and a torture instrument that looks for any excuse to convince us of something that makes us miserable. But the good news is, there IS a way out of suffering. You CAN have freedom and happiness, right now, and you don't need to need anything outside of yourself to do this. All it requires is that we create a new relationship to our mind and our thoughts. The following 5 practices are ones that I have discovered on my journey that have given me back ownership over my mind and my emotions. I can say with 100% confidence that if you start to practice these 5 simple techniques in your daily routine, you will have more peace and freedom in your very first day.

In order to be free, you have to be willing to be free. You need to be sick of the old thought patterns that have been holding you back from reaching your highest potential. You need to

take responsibility for your internal states and stop putting your power into the world around you by blaming it for everything. You are the Mighty Chooser, not a passive victim. I got into the habit for a while of blaming everyone for causing me anger, anxiety, or pain. Then I realized that I was also partially responsible, because I was the one allowed them to influence my energy field with mere words. I would interpret their words a certain way, create a story around the event, and then be miserable the rest of the day. I was disempowering myself by putting the keys to my inner peace into the hands of other people, and then would expect to receive a lollipop from the universe every time I got upset. There are many ways in which you can prevent suffering for yourself, but it starts with a realization that you are the author of your emotional state. You aren't just an editor, or a co-author. The day I started looking inside myself for solutions to my misery is the day I put the power back into my own hands. You are the security guard to your inner sanctuary. If a guy showed up at your front door and you knew he was a thief trying to steal from you, would you let him inside? If he happened to make his way inside, would you allow him to start stealing your things? Would you sit him down and give him a beer and talk with him about how you really wish he would just leave? In the same way that you wouldn't allow a thief to come into your house and start stealing your things, you don't have to allow thoughts to come into your temple and start stealing your happiness. Your mind is your space. Don't let anything occupy it against your will.

Practice 1: Stop and take 10 seconds.

For some strange reason, the mind is convinced that it has to think about your problems all day or else they won't get resolved. An amazing realization is that no matter how immediate

or seemingly important an issue is in your life, you can always take just 10 seconds to not think about it. Sometimes it's very difficult to stop thinking about a problem in our life for good, but the mind will always be able to understand that not thinking about your problem for just 10 seconds is justifiable. I often found that when I couldn't stop thinking about something I no longer wanted to think about, it's because thoughts in my mind convinced me it was necessary and that my world would fall apart if I took a break. But you can always give yourself permission to take just a fraction of a minute away from thinking. What can possibly go wrong by taking a ten second breather? The thoughts about your problems will be waiting for you at the end of the ten seconds, if you wish to keep thinking about them. You could be going through relationship problems, or a physical illness. Maybe you are about to lose your job or are undergoing a financial crisis. Whatever your situation may be, you can always justify just ten seconds of silence. You will be amazed at how many solutions you will arrive at when you take a moment to zoom out and practice perfect stillness. Become alert, and aware, without thinking. Just for 10 seconds.

One of the realizations that set in for me when I would attempt to take a ten second break from thinking is that thinking is an addiction. I couldn't stop doing it, and it felt so good to do. Thought is a drug. We can't stop indulging in it. Our minds crave it, and we can't resist the cravings it gets. And the worst part is, we end up emotional victims to whatever thoughts it decides to feed off of. But the amazing thing is, you don't have to spend your entire day being subject to whatever thoughts pass through your mind. You can enact your will and actually choose to not think.

“But don't I need to think about my problems if I want to come to solutions?”. Some of life's biggest dilemmas require thought, and some problems only exist in thought. Thought

is a tool. It's like a hammer. It serves a valuable purpose when it needs to be called upon, but when it is not needed it can be put down temporarily. It's silly to swing a hammer all day when it's not hitting anything. Some of the greatest ideas and revolutions have been birthed out of thought, but only because it was used properly and harnessed using our will. If not used properly, thought can be destructive and even deadly. If thoughts are occurring against our will when we don't want them to arise, and if we can take just ten seconds to zoom out and observe this, we can catch the thought pattern in action and break the addiction. When in a state of anxiety, anger, or depression, you may encounter resistance when trying to take ten seconds away from thought. This is because the mind loses its strength when we choose to be silent, and it's momentum wants to continue to carry you down the endless stream of mental noise. The voices will literally try to drag your attention in so that they can strengthen their own reality. But even the mind's resistance to silence can be observed by you.

Mini meditations like these are a great way to test whether or not your thoughts are yours or are that of habit. Right now, claim this in your mind: "For the next 10 seconds, I am not going to believe a SINGLE thing my mind says because I am going to choose not to think. Any thought that arises is just a pattern and is not reflective of my will or intentions". Sure enough, halfway through you will see thoughts arise again. But they aren't yours. They are patterns. And you know this because you already claimed that any thought that arises is not yours. Try to not think for just ten seconds right now, and pay attention to the involuntary thought patterns that arise.

Practice 2: Go into the Now. Become super aware of your immediate sense perceptions.

It's so easy to allow thinking to suck up all of our attention and completely consume us. It's so common to go through half a day or a full day just daydreaming the entire time. As convincing and enticing our thoughts may be, the truth is that thought has no essential reality. Thoughts are just voices that arise in our minds, and almost all of them are dedicated to past or possible future situations which don't actually exist in reality. If you all of a sudden couldn't speak English, you wouldn't understand anything your mind was telling you, and you would probably be the most peaceful you have ever been. What does this tell us about the nature of the voices in our head? That they only have power when we give reality to them. We have to fuel them with our belief and they only have the ability to influence us if we entertain them. We can choose to take our attention away from thinking and into what is actually real. What is real is the here and now. What is real is that which this present moment contains.

Take a moment right now to become still and observe the contents of this moment. The feeling of your butt on your chair. The incoming light. Maybe there are sounds coming in from another room or outside. Become deeply aware of your immediate sense perceptions. What does it feel like to be inside your body? This is reality. The mind cannot argue with the fact only this moment is real. It is never not this moment. The past exists as a story, as a series of thoughts in the mind. The future exists as a hypothetical present moment, but only the contents of this moment contribute to actual existence. Right now. This Now. This moment is all you have, and all you ever will have for the rest of your life. We live as if the

present moment is somehow secondary to the possibility of the future moment, but what could be of higher importance than reality?

“But the past does exist. I have children and photographs proving it doesn’t just exist in my mind. I see the past every time I look in the mirror. It made me who I am”. What if I asked you “Where does the past exist? Show me where the past is.” The only thing you could do is point to the evidence of past present moments in the now. You would be referring to a previous now, but the previous now is no longer contained in this moment meaning it no longer exists. It is only contained in the mind as a story, as a series of thoughts in the mind, and the only time you could tell that story is right now. We cannot access any previous present moments except by thinking about them in the current now. The now is the only space in which reality unfolds. The past and future exist exclusively as mental fabrications. They are illusory. When we recognize their nonexistence and direct our attention to the contents of this moment, all guilt and sadness from the past starts to lose its grip on us, and all worry and anxiety over the future begins to dissolve. The majority of our suffering is caused because our attention is dedicated in these two places, meaning we are never actually aligned with life. We are only aligned with what life was, or the thought or what it could be. Spend a moment right now to pause what you are doing, and take in the fact that only this moment is real. Step outside of the stream of thought, take a deep breath, and become super alert and attentive to what is occurring right in front of you. Hear the birds. Feel the air on your skin. Don’t think about feeling it, just feel it. You don’t need to say to yourself “I’m feeling the air right now” in order for you to feel it. Just simply notice what is, without placing judgement or interpretation. The mind will want to start naming things and classifying what it sees. It is a habit of the mind to comment on everything that it sees, but

just be aware of what is there without commenting on it. Watch, without judgement. Silently watch. Just be present and listen, without adding any additional content to the moment. Do this right now.

This is something you can practice whenever you start feeling anxiety over something to come in the future, or guilt or depression over something that has happened in the past. Both are thoughts about something which isn't currently happening, yet we are still reacting to them as if they are actually happening. We develop emotional responses to thoughts regarding events that don't even exist in reality. Kind of strange to consider isn't it? Whenever you feel yourself overwhelmed with an emotion, ask yourself this. "Is this emotion being caused by something happening right now?". Most of the time, the answer is no. But maybe the mind will respond by saying "But I might lose my job, and I'm not sure about my life or where I want to go, and I don't know how I'm going to pay rent next month". How many of these problems are actually real and exist right in front of you here and now? How much of the stress and anxiety surrounding the problem still remains once you decide to stop thinking about them? If you got hit on the head with a rock and suffered amnesia for 10 seconds, would those problems still carry such an emotional weight? Is it productive to redundantly think about them all day? They only become problems when they weigh on our emotions, and they can only weight on our emotions if we are constantly dwelling on them. We are not interested in thoughts right now. You can come back to them later if you want. Just observe what is in front of you. Watch and listen. You can do this drill on the bus, in the shower, driving to work, or wherever you may be. It's great to get into the habit of asking yourself "What is happening RIGHT now?", and then shift your awareness away from thought and into reality.

Practice 3: Choosing your mental activity.

A video by my friend [Nathaniel Solace](#) provoked this realization within me. Did you know that you can actually choose which thought you want to think? In your head right now, say the word “Dolphin”. Actually say it in your head, right now. Now say it really loud in your head like you are yelling it across the street to somebody. “DOLPHIN!”. Now say your favourite colour in your head out loud. Now say your favourite colour 3 times fast in your head. Pay attention to how it feels to choose a thought, and how much different it feels from the rest of the thoughts we think. When you drop a glass of milk, the mind may say “Great, now look what you did. Just another thing to go wrong this day. Why does this always happen to me?”. Did you choose to think that? Does it feel the same as when you choose your own thoughts? Out of the tens of thousands of thoughts you think each day, how many of them are actually chosen by you in the same way that you chose to think about your favourite colour? How many of them are just habitual unconscious thought patterns? How many are old programs running? And who is outside of all of this to know this?

It’s a good habit to get into not only choosing a new thought, but choosing a new story composed of a series of thoughts. For example, you may be depressed because you feel that you are stuck in rut. The thoughts running through your head may be something like “I don’t know what to do, I don’t know where I’m going, my life isn’t how I want it to be”. But you can easily catch your mental programs reacting this way against your will, and use your

will to create the alternative thoughts “I am learning what to do, and this current phase is only a stepping stone that will lead me to where I want to be in life”. Notice how your body reacts to the introduction of a positive thought. Your body loves it. More serotonin gets released immediately the moment you chose a more positive perspective. You can feel the levels of stress and anxiety decrease right away, and all you did was say some words in your mind which were equally as true and valid as the ones that were causing you suffering. Why not choose a positive perspective more often? It feels great. The more you can feel great, the more productive you will be, the more clarity you will have to address issues in your life, and the more energy you will have to get you to where you want to go.

But sometimes, it’s hard to convince your mind of a new thought. Adopting a positive belief system is useful and effective, but sometimes it is best to not to try to convince yourself of anything, and to just be neutral in your response to both the positive and the negative perspectives. Both are stories that our egos are bringing to the table. Catch the mind wanting to judge you or a situation the next time something unfortunate happens. If we can recognize that both stories are just mental judgements of the situation and we can witness the mind doing this, then we can chose to disidentify from the judger. Sometimes it’s great to just recognize the transience of thought, realize that neither of the stories in your mind are contained within the reality in front of you, and just stay where you are. Drop them both. You don’t have to try to convince yourself to subscribe to a new set of thoughts. You are the awareness of both, so stay in the awareness. When a story is created in your mind about something that is happening, you are experiencing that thing as it pertains to the thinker. But in reality, the thinker is not you, and the thing being experienced doesn’t pertain or relate to anything in and of itself. It simply exists. If you damage your car or get ill or break something, you can create any story you want around why it is happening. One

story may get you upset, the other may calm you down. But in reality, the situation just is. So accept it, and proceed to a solution.

A few winters ago, I was driving home during a freezing rain storm on a country road and lost control of my car. My car started sliding and skidded down a steep ditch where it went over a bunch of rocks as I gripped tightly on to the steering wheel to prevent my car from steering into a tree. My car got written off, and I injured my back. In all honestly, I should have flipped my car because of how steep the ditch was, and I would have hit a telephone pole if I didn't hit the support wire holding it into the ground. I literally could have killed myself. After my car came to a stop, I calmly stepped out into 2 feet of snow and sat on hood of my car, took a few conscious breaths and turned my attention to the silence of the snowy forest that was in front of me. I took a moment to just listen to the gentle breeze and watch the slow snowfall. The sound of water dripping from the tree branches was magical, and the silence of the forest seemed infinite. I was fully immerse in the Now. I sat on my car in a state of deep inner stillness for several minutes before making a phone call. It was one of the most peaceful moments I have ever had, not because of the nature of my situation but because of the way I chose to interact with it. You can either bring consciousness in and respond with will and intention, or you can be at the whim of whatever automatic reaction occurs in your mind. In that moment's most basic contents, there were only two basic ingredients that were present. There was the situation, and there was that which needed to be done to take care of it. These are the only two elements that will ever be intrinsic to an event. My car crashed, and a phone call needed to be made. All that existed was the event. The story around the event is what we bring to the table, and is what causes the majority of the suffering. In other words, the majority of our suffering is actually self-created by the

way we choose to process the situation in front of us. I could have started saying to myself “Way to drive too fast and ruin your whole day. Why did you have to do that, what the hell were you thinking?” But what good would these thoughts do? What constructive purpose would they serve? We resist what reality contains when we don’t like it, we judge it as being “bad”, and then create an interpretation around why it is happening. This is where suffering is born. The suffering is caused by the way we think about reality. Next time you are confronted with a reality that is unpleasing, try not thinking about it unless the thoughts contribute to a solution. Don’t judge it as being good or bad. It just is. Take a deep breath, clear your mind, and drop both the positive and the negative interpretation. What remains?

Practice 4: Bring consciousness to actions that are normally performed unconsciously.

In one of Eckhart Tolle’s videos, he mentioned the concept of treating an action that is normally a means to an end as an end in itself. For example, walking from the front door to the car is an action that we normally don’t bring much attention to because it is an intermediate step to reaching a goal. We daydream our way to our vehicle, and then daydream our way to wherever we are going once we get into our car. These daydreams are usually filled with unnecessary thoughts that cause us more suffering and misery. We waste a lot of our time daydreaming away our present moment because our mind is so obsessed with getting to the next moment and the next moment, as if ‘the next moment’ ever arrives, and as if the next moment is more important than this one.

Try to bring attention to every single action that you normally wouldn't treat as being important. Have to go to the bathroom? Be present when you get up and when you start walking there. Feel your feet on the floor as you take each step, and be there with each movement in your body. The mind will want to start rambling, but don't let it overtake you, just for a minute. Putting the dishes away? ACTUALLY put them away. Feel the dishes in your hand. How do they feel? Sense the texture. Don't think about feeling them, just feel them. Pay attention to the feeling of the weight being released as you set the dish down. Hear the noise it makes against the other dishes. It almost has an energy field of its own that you can interact with, and on a molecular level it really does. As weird as this may seem, it's actually a good practice to hold an object and just sense it in your hand without thinking about it. "But how is paying attention to putting dishes away going to solve my problems?". It doesn't solve the problems, but what it does is generate present moment awareness, which creates a breakage in the stream of compulsive thought. This compulsive involuntary stream of thought is what causes suffering. The more present you are with what is occurring in this moment, the less you will suffer at the hand of your own mind.

Something I have been reflecting on is how fast time seems to fly by in our life. The mind is obsessed with anticipating a future moment which never actually arrives, and it is so easy to spend decades of your life working towards the next moment and the next moment with your consciousness totally invested in the thought of what will occupy your next reality, and then wake up one day and think "Where the hell did my life go?". This phenomenon is caused by an absence of presence. Of course life will feel like it is flying by if we never take a moment to actually experience it and if we only ever treat this moment as a means to a future moment which never comes. One minute is actually a long time. Next time you step outside your house, be totally present with what is happening around you. Immerse

yourself in the sensory data all around you. Be present on your way outside, and on your way back inside. When our attention is invested in reality, we experience more. When we experience more, we evolve more, we build more memories, and we learn more. Life does not fly by when we actually give life our attention.

Taking conscious breaths is another great way to generate awareness. Take one right now. Breathe deeply into your stomach through your nose, and feel your lungs expand as they fill with air. Notice the brief pause at the end of the inhale, and then be there with the breath as your lungs relax during the exhale. Breathing is something we take for granted so often. We give so much attention to the redundant chatter in our heads that bring us misery, and hardly any to the breath which is constantly giving us life. When there are times when I am really stressed out or anxious about something, I will notice my breaths will always be short and choppy instead of deep and fluid. No matter how stressed or overwhelmed you may seem, you always have the power to take at least 3 deep conscious breaths. You will always notice an improvement in your emotional state right away.

Today, try to test yourself to be consciously aware during activities that you normally perform in autopilot mode. For myself, riding a bike is something which used to breed a wide array of unnecessary and useless thoughts. I would hop on the seat, and as soon as I started peddling my mind would start thinking about something I saw on YouTube a few weeks ago, or what I would do if a certain hypothetical situation came into being. Because my mind thought of the bike as “transportation”, I got into the habit of getting consciously lazy and letting its ramblings overtake me until I arrived at my destination. Try to be in your

legs with each pedal, feel the contraction of the muscle fibres. Sense the air and the sun on your skin. Feel the rubber handlebars in the palms of your hands, and stay in the space of being alert to the present moment. Next time you take a shower, actually be there. Instead of daydreaming about what you are going to do at work for the day, feel the water on your skin and listen to the sound it makes as it hits the floor. Become hyper-aware of your sense perceptions. When you are walking up or down a set of stairs, listen to the sound of the steps beneath your feet. Even waiting at a red light is a great opportunity to practice present moment awareness. Notice the radiance of the red hue, and bring your awareness to the sounds of the other cars and people outside. You aren't travelling to a future moment any more. You are now aligned with the contents of reality. You are aligned with truth. You are fully immersed in the Now. Who would have thought that sitting at a red light could be a spiritually enlightening experience? It's always good to take just a few seconds away from autopilot mode, create a breakage in the stream of automatic thoughts, and bring your full attention to an action that is normally just a method from getting from moment A to moment B.

Practice 5: Become the observer.

This is the greatest kept secret of all. No matter how busy and cluttered your mind is, and no matter how much pain it is causing you, you can always choose to be the witness of it. Instead of being the character in the unfolding of your life, you have the ability to become

the witness of this character. Something that I've been asking myself a lot lately whenever I feel something distasteful in my mind or in my energy field is "Can it be seen?". The answer is always yes. If it can be seen by you, and if you can point to it, then it's not you. If you can notice it happening within you, then there is an implicit separation between you (the noticer) and the activity which is being noticed. There is the thought or the emotion, and then there is the awareness outside of the thought or the emotion that is able to notice it. Even right now, you are thinking. But you are also aware that you are thinking. Which part of you exists outside of thinking that knows it is taking place? Which part of you is more real? Which part of you is more fundamental and more essential? An amazing realization is that the thinker is not who you are. You are not your mind, and you are not the voices in your head. You are instead the conscious space that thought exists within. Go to the place of that space, and rest there as the background awareness of the activity.

A lot of time, effort, and pain can be prevented if we take the time to actually sense the dimension of awareness that is deeper than both thought and emotion. Observing our thoughts and emotions is the most effective way to do this. If a thought passes through our mind and we can stop ourselves and decide not to attach to it, what power does it have? If you are not identified with it, then it has no power over you. You break identification by watching it. Imagine that the sky didn't know that it was the sky, and that it was trying to find inner peace believing that it was the clouds the entire time. Imagine it was trying to discover itself but was totally oblivious to the vastness of its own identity during the majority of its search. It would look to the passing clouds to try to gain a sense of fulfillment, and would derive its sense of self and happiness from the activity that was taking place within it. Every time a rain cloud passed by, it would get all worked up and try to

defuse it as quickly as possible. It would spend all day trying to keep only the best clouds in the sky to stay happy, and would spend an immeasurable amount of time and energy trying to suppress undesirable clouds. Imagine that it finally gave up and stopped resisting the clouds for a little bit, and then discovered that it didn't have to fight off any clouds in the first place because the clouds were ultimately irrelevant to its identity. They are just fleeting forms.

As the sky begins to rest deeper and deeper into itself, it sees the transience of the clouds and discovers that they are nothing more than mere surface activity. It is now free from the burden of being overwhelmed with the clouds because it now can decide not to give them its attention. It can instead just watch them pass without making a fuss about them. The identification with them has been broken, and it is now free from the pain and exhaustion that they had previously caused. In the same way that clouds are just surface activities on the vastness of the sky, your thoughts are just clouds passing through the landscape of your consciousness. They are not you, and they say nothing about who or what you are. I sometimes catch myself daydreaming about things that make me feel ashamed and embarrassed, but only if I think that I am the one who is actually choosing to think these things. If thoughts are happening on their own, the mind is using your awareness to fuel its own activity. This is how it survives. Thought can only exist and have power over your emotional state if you fuel it by giving it your attention. The mind has an agenda of its own, and this will be recognized upon practicing being the silent witness to the mind. The clouds which pass through your mind are not always expressions of you, and spending your life trying to smooth over the thoughts is like trying to calm down the ripples on the surface of an ocean. It will never be done, and it doesn't have to be. Let the thoughts do their own thing, and stay there in the awareness of them. The key is not to just understand this on a mental or conceptual level, but to actually experience the space of awareness beneath them. Saying the words in your head "I'm going to watch the mind" is in itself just more thinking, and can also be seen my something deeper. The secret is to stop adding more content to the

mental chatter, and to silently observe the constant stream of thought. Watch the mind. Don't think about watching it, just do it. Take the time to practice being the witness to activity taking place within you, and rest there as the witness. The identification with thought and emotion will slowly dissolve as the deeper dimension of awareness becomes more and more familiar. Remember: Can it be seen? If so, by what?

Repetitive thoughts of fear, panic, self defeat, and self victimization are almost always programs running on their own, and all of them will stop ruling your emotions and your life the minute you decide you are going to watch them from a higher place. Next time you feel such thoughts or emotions overcome you, take a moment to adopt the perspective of the disinterested observer. To “watch” a thought, is to notice that it is there. Listening to it is equally as effective, and you will notice that if you listen to it that there is literally a voice saying words in your head all day. Listening to the voice for the first time as the awareness behind it and realizing that it's not you is almost kind of scary. It is some foreign entity separate from your will and intention that is rambling on about the same crap all day. We are literally possessed by these voices, and they end up driving us into misery and sometimes insanity.

When you watch/listen to it, don't think about the fact that you see it, and don't resist it. Don't interpret or judge what you see, because to do so would be to re-identify with the mental activity. Just be there as effortlessly as possible, and let it pass through you as you stay in the awareness. If you identify with a ripple, such as a thought, it will create an emotional correspondence. The emotional/energetic field will then fuel more of those

same kinds of thoughts, which create more emotional correspondence, and then we play the game of trying to figure out why we are so depressed, only to find ourselves reaching for a drink, a pill, or a cigarette. And it all started with identification with a thought, with a passing form in our consciousness. If we instead can see the thought before it causes us emotional distress, and can realize within ourselves that the thinker is not who we are, we can break free from the bondage of being emotionally enslaved to whatever thought passes through our minds. You are the observer of literally all mental activities. Peace begins with an internal realization that the mind and its contents are not who you are. This comes when you experience yourself as something that lies beyond the mind and beyond thought; the witnessing presence. You are not the voices in your head. Just as a room is the space and not the furniture within it, you are the space of consciousness and not the objects within it.

This is when you begin to separate the true Self (pure consciousness, the I Am) from the egoic self wrapped up in self-thought and personal stories. The eternal subject (you) begins to peel away from the objects that arise within the awareness (thoughts, notions, beliefs, etc) and you discover that you can watch them within yourself as a distant observer. In other words, the awareness breaks away from the person. The soul starts watching the ego. The ego is what is sometimes described as the part of us that is identified with thought and story. It is the thought-based self. A mental construct if you will. It has preferences and mood swings. It has opinions, desires, likes, passions and a personal history. We normally live AS these characteristics, instead of recognizing them as objects in our awareness. You are aware of all of these things. It also gets defensive and aggressive when it's identity feels challenged by thoughts which contradict the story it replays to itself about who and what it is. For example, when you ask someone who they are, they will most likely respond by

saying something along the lines of " I'm an American Christian middle class business woman with 2 college degrees and 3 kids." They are confusing their identity with a series of thoughts in their head. They are deriving their sense of self from mere words. And all it takes is for someone to challenge Christianity, the country of America, or the education system for that person to feel personally offended. It's ok to have beliefs and to be proud of your accomplishments, but your beliefs are not you. Your history is not you. Your job is not you. Your thoughts and emotions are not you. Your car and bank account are not you. Your diet is not you.

All of these things belong to you and exist separately from your identity. If a thought personally offends you, you have identified with the thinker and thus the false mind-made self. Only a thought can feel threatened by a thought. Next time you feel offended, ask yourself "Who is getting offended, and what is it trying to protect?". It is almost always the ego trying to fight for it's life against thoughts that threaten it's identity. When you stop deriving your sense of self from the thoughts in your head, in other words, when you stop identifying with passing clouds, you don't care anymore. When our sense of identity comes from our experience of Being within ourselves instead of from the story we tell ourselves in our minds, we are free from the dreadful need to constantly defend and uphold a mental self-image. Even the feeling of being offended can be watched if we turn our attention to our energy field and our thoughts upon encountering something offensive. And if you can point to it, it's not you. If you can see it, it exists separately from you. If it can change or if it can be removed, it's not you. Anything you can be the witness to is superficial, and identifying with the superficial will never bring true happiness or fulfilment. Don't identify with anything that can be witnessed. You are that which remains when everything that can be seen is removed.

What remains is the “I Am”, before it becomes the “I am this” or “I am that”. We live our entire lives sometimes completely separated from the ‘I Am’, and thus from God. We suffer because we have allowed our minds to convince us of their own reality and convince us that its chatter is more important than the space it occupies. We live our lives not knowing there is a deeper dimension to our being which is the doorway to spiritual enlightenment. And this dimension is Being itself. It is eternal and unchanging. It is essence of who and what you are, prior to becoming identified and distracted with ego and thought. The mind may have trouble understanding it on a conceptual level, but that’s ok because it is not necessary to convince our minds of anything. Even the sense of confusion can be witnessed by the dimension of pure awareness. And this dimension of pure awareness is ultimately you. Upon sensing this awareness as being you, a shift in consciousness takes place. A space opens up. A weight is lifted off. You are no longer interested in entertaining the mind’s self-chatter, because something more substantial and real has been discovered within you. A new dimension is activated. Identification with the sufferer is broken.

Sometimes, it is difficult to step outside of the mind and break the habit of thought. I used to be addicted to thinking about my problems. I couldn’t stop. I created a story in my mind that I was miserable or supposed to be anxious about something, and then would create another story about how I had to do something to remedy the anxiety. Then it dawned on me that I was actually able to watch my “self” suffer and try to cure its own anxiety. Something

inside me could watch myself suffer. So who was it that was suffering? The ego suffers. The mind suffers. The witness does not suffer. I realized that I had spent years of my life trying to solve a problem that only existed because I chose to identify with thoughts in my mind, and nobody had ever told me that transcendence was an option. This is why I generally don't read "self-help" books, because they are all designed to cure a fictitious self which exists superficially to the underlying Self that you really are. They teach you to operate as the egoic mind-identified self, instead of revealing a deeper truth about your identity and showing you how to access it within yourself.

Becoming the witness is the most essential step to experiencing freedom. Instead of being pulled in by the mind, watch it try to pull you in. Instead of trying to think your way into peace, just be in the Being, and sense it within you as your most fundamental identity. Develop a relationship with that inner space, the eternal witness. The rest will fall away it's own. All of the practices mentioned are intended to create an experience and a discovery within you that reality does not exist in the mind, and that the thoughts in your head only have power if you feed them attention. We literally bring our problems into reality by believing thoughts into existence, and then we have to believe another set of thoughts to get rid of those thoughts. It becomes a pattern which can only be broken by zooming out and accessing a new dimension within yourself beyond thought, which can be done by watching the thinker. Who is watching this battle between good thoughts and bad thoughts? You see the mind battle with itself. The key is to stop caring about what it has to say. It doesn't matter any more. It's just chatter, and you can listen to it all from a distance. Can it be seen? Stay in your center, and watch those thoughts pass by.

The practices mentioned in the book are only a means to bring you up to a heightened state of seeing, and only need to be used as a way for you to train yourself to create shifts in your consciousness away from excessive thinking. The previous 4 techniques really help with creating a stoppage in the misery-causing thought stream. They create a gap in the constant series of thoughts that play in our heads. Once you can create that gap and discover for yourself that the voices in your head are not you, you break identification with the mind. You still exist, even when you are not thinking. Once we understand the disease of thought and recognize it as the root of suffering, and once we know how to create shifts away from thought, we no longer have to do anything. We don't have to think about anything. We can just choose to be present with the moment. We can choose not to think and be the witness to the mind. It's an immediate shift. It may require some practice and navigation at first, but there is nothing you have to do to be present. To be you is to be present, and all you have to do to be you is to stop identifying with the mind. It's easy for the mind to become obsessed with trying to solve its own problems and for the practices to end up being what actually block us from the experiences we wish to have. I suffered from this for about a year, and then realized that the "trying" was actually keeping me from reaching peace. "Trying" is just more activity arising in your awareness, which can also be seen. I could literally watch myself trying to be happy. Who was watching this trying? As long as you are trying to get somewhere, you are under the impression that something is missing. There is nothing missing or incomplete, there are only things in the way of the experience of your true essence which is already aligned with freedom itself. 'Trying' fails to take us to this experience, because as long as you are trying, you are working towards a future moment. But only Now exists. Be here right now, as effortlessly as you can.

A huge weight is lifted off once you let go of trying so hard. Let go of the thought of getting somewhere. Let go of the thought that you aren't already free, or that you have to do something to be free. You can't think your way into freedom. Do that which is most effortless. Rest into your inner being in the Now, where peace already resides. And if "rest" makes you feel like you have to do something, then don't rest. Don't do anything. Do nothing, and be nothing. These practices essentially serve the purpose of helping you do 'nothing' better. You are already present, so don't try to be present. Only thought prevents you from experiencing this. Thought wants to convince you that you have to do something to obtain peace in a future moment, but there is nothing outside of you that you need to obtain, and there is no such thing as a moment other than this one. There is no need to search, because there is nothing missing. Peace does not come in the form of a laundry list of things you need to do. It's in fact the opposite. There is nothing you have to do to have peace because peace is the nature of your soul. It's what's left when you allow the clouds to pass. Take a deep breath. Listen to the voices in your head. You are the witness of them. Look around you. What is happening right now? You are here, right now, and you're at peace. Only this moment exists, and in this moment, you are free.

Think Less. Be More. Live Free.

Thank you for checking this book out! I hope you gained some insights from reading this, and I hope you try to practice some of these things in your daily life. Some of these practices literally saved my life. This book was intended to be a brief introduction into the concepts of presence and consciousness as a way out of suffering, and I really hope that

these practices will help you on your journey as they have for me. Please feel free to provide me with any feedback you may have. As a 21 year old who is just starting out his journey as a writer, I really appreciate all the feedback I can receive.

I do intend to write more in depth in a full-length published book about the nature of the soul, the ego, the mind, God, thought, intuition, spirituality, suffering, transcendence, and other related topics. There are a variety of other practices that I have developed that help initiate shifts in consciousness. I wish to include this in a more detailed account in the full length book, along with a less rigid account of spiritual awareness and how we can apply it to our lives. Before we can explore the magic of the inner realms of the soul, we have to first free ourselves from what we are not. In the mean time, I will be working on a second ebook shortly regarding the nature of addiction and how to overcome it. This will also be available for free once it is finished. If you feel this material provoked something deep within you and you wish to read more similar content right away, I highly recommend *The Power of Now* by Eckhart Tolle. I literally cannot read past the first chapter because it is so dense with truth. You will certainly gain something from giving it a read.

For those of you who wish to stay connected, you can follow me personally on [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#), and on [Youtube](#) where I will be making me first video “How to Meditate” in the near future. Thank you for your time and support. I hope you have an awesome day. God bless. You are infinitely loved.

Steve, SSM

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